

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943

FX14 Lovedu FX14

said that his father treated him as an outcast in order to deceive the people. Khasbati was, however, given ritual precedence and in this as well as in the fact that it was the line of Malegugu, great son of Mugodo, which provided the 'husbands' of the last two queens, we may see perhaps an attempt to compensate the great son and retain his allegiance. The pattern of antagonism to the true heir continued to be followed by the queens. Mugodo was outcast from the capital, Mujaji I was born in despised Lekhwami, and Mujaji II and III were expelled from the country.

The choice of the heir among the kings is represented as exercised by them personally; he who must raise the heir to the queens is chosen by an inner, secret 'council' of relatives. We cannot describe its membership by saying that one is a sister, the other a brother, and so on; each is related to the chief in a dozen ways and their pre-eminence in the royal 'council' derives from complicated inter-relationships, prestige, sagacity, and loyalty as well as institutionalized arrangements.

The accession of queens has raised new problems of succession. The heir apparent is theoretically prohibited from having children before she ascends, and, when she ascends, her powers of bearing children may be exhausted. This is a simple statement of a much more complicated situation, but suffice it to add that, ideally, should the queen or, if she is barren, her wife who is chosen to bear the heir, have male issue, the child has either to be killed or to be excluded by a mechanism with strong social or ritual sanctions—namely, the opening of the door. Mujaji I's son was killed, so it is said; but the uterine brother of Mujaji III was allowed to live and become a great councillor. Another problem is the exclusion from power of the 'husband' of the queen. Queens may not marry, but the physiological father of their children may be a councillor, as he was in the reign of Mujaji III, and it is essential that he should be a close relative. To support such arrangements in a patrilineal society is one of the functions of the 'opening of the door'. It also confirms choices made by the inner 'council', visibly and publicly demonstrates the will of the ancestors, enforces loyalty to all relatives of the royal house any one of whom may become chief, and unmistakably points out to whose hands the rain secrets have been entrusted.

The quarrels and conflicts leading to the flight of the heir are much stressed in tradition; they are nothing if not realistic, and one is often in doubt whether they are genuine or merely staged conflicts. Leakhali and her brother, together with Leakhali's daughter, Mujaji III, were genuinely expelled. Leakhali had her own village and her own wives and was proud and independent; she and her brother objected to the influence of a doctor who had come to cure Mujaji II of her barrenness, but stayed to be her lover. After a public insult to this doctor in the presence of the queen at a beer-party at Leakhali's village, the queen sent her wife the calabash and firebrand. Leakhali and her brother fled, and in exile Mujaji III was taught by her mother's brother, thus fulfilling, it is said, the law that the heir must be taught by her maternal uncle. The situation appears to be re-enacted to-day, with this difference, that it is the queen's own daughter who, after her lover's quarrel with a great councillor, fled

643 to join him in exile. The conflict was so serious that the tribe seethed
 578 with disaffection, though the queen seemed to be torn between love for
 687 her daughter and disapproval of the whole episode. The present conflict
 644 is in many respects typical. There is, as there used to be in the past,
 strife between the old councillors, who lose their power when the old
 queen dies, and the new councillors, who side with the new queen. The
 latter gradually supplant the former, but regard with fear the day when
 the friends of the heir in turn will oust them. This struggle is very real,
 and seems to reflect a more fundamental conflict; for the exalted purpose
 of the royal institutions exacts an unnatural sacrifice by the queen in
 order to make way for the heir she naturally loves.

643 The whole royal complex is perfectly logical once it is granted that there
 644 must be queens, that succession is uncertain, and that ritual suicide is
 the guarantee of the chief's divinity. In a society in which the 'sister'
 (*Ahadi*) is priestess, her great religious role, still seen to-day among
 neighbouring tribes where chiefs are males, falls to the queen among the
 Lovedu. The ideal, imperfectly actualized since queens replaced kings,
 still persists that the *Ahadi* of the chief should have power and be given a
 large district to rule. In theory the brother of the chief is the great
 councillor, general, and judge. But in practice the complications set up
 by having queens throws these arrangements out of gear. True to pattern,
 the greatest district head is to-day a woman, who is a 'sister' to the queen
 and, though a 'sister' threefold (through mother, legal father, and paternal
 uncle), she is not the uterine or ritual 'sister'. At present the relatives
 through the queen's mother, not through Mujaji II her legal father, are
 important councillors, but it is not unlikely that in the next reign the
 great councillors will be the present heir's relatives through her legal
 father, the queen, who is also her physiological mother.

642 Owing to the inapplicability of the term 'council' to Lovedu arrange-
 643 ments, we need say only a few words on this subject. There is no need
 644 of a visible organization to support Lovedu court life, which is ceremoni-
 ous, but not politically oriented. Power and authority derive from the
 queen's divine appointment, her exclusive secret of rain-making, and her
 strategic position in the social web. She is neither a military nor a
 political leader; she does not even have a priesthood organization to assist
 her in her function as high-priest. There are confidential advisers, but
 they neither constitute the more or less definite secret council (*sephiri*)
 of some neighbouring tribes nor necessarily function as political coun-
 cillors; on the contrary the former, having assisted in the accession of the
 queen; are in institutional conflict with the latter, who later gain political
 control. The councillors represent the assertion of power by the rising
 generation of men in the sphere of law and politics as against women and
 the older generation in ritual, religion, and the social system. They are
 part mainly of the court (*Akuro*) and the tribal gathering (*Akivjo*), two
 indeterminate bodies.

644 Confidential advisers are mainly important district heads; councillors
 643 are always residents in the capital. Both are relatives, but, in the case of
 634 the confidants, not necessarily close relatives of the queen. In the inner
 royal circle, the closest kin are necessarily those reckoned through the

queen's mother—that is, either the queen's predecessor on the throne or, if she has borne no children, the queen's physiological mother. The unofficial husbands of the queens are brothers chosen from the line of Malegudu (elder brother of Mujaji I), but relationship is not reckoned through them as fathers. Closeness of relationship is important, but personality and opportunity count as much. The most influential councillor is often said to be the queen's mother's brother—in other words, the brother of the deceased queen or, if she has no issue, the brother of the wife of the queen who bore the queen. In fact, however, other relatives rise to equally influential positions. To take a concrete instance, the councillors of Mujaji III have been relatives either through Leakhali, chief wife and 'sister' of Mujaji II and physiological mother of Mujaji III, or through Mujaji II, her mother, Mujaji I, and the latter's brothers, such as Malegudu. Muneri, the chief councillor to-day, is Leakhali's uterine brother's son, and before him there were Mulogwane, uterine brother of the queen, and also Leakhali's uterine brother. Earlier still, but in the present queen's time, the greatest councillors were others tracing descent from Malegudu. There is no precise rule either as to the number or identity of the councillors. The *duma* of the queen should not be a relative; he is merely a messenger, and, unlike the *induna* elsewhere, is of no account, having no special legal or other status or function.

The *Akhijjo* is neither the more or less determinate body of private advisers (*akxotlo*), nor even the tribal gathering (*pitso*), of the Sotho. It is mainly constituted by district heads, or their representatives, and the men of the capital, but any one attends; and it is never conceived of as a general assembly of all the initiated men of the tribe. It has little power and less initiative; it is summoned mostly to discuss European matters, and there is now a tendency to place some decisions of the men of the capital before it for confirmation; but it is hardly a means of gauging popular feeling or of expressing the royal will. The co-operation of the tribe is secured and its desires made known, not through the *Akhijjo*, but through other social arrangements, which we shall describe at greater length.

These arrangements run parallel with a distinctive system of wives of the queen, called *oqajani*, a term also applied to the wives of all nobles and women other than the queen may have *oqajani*. The majority of the queen's wives are given to her by her district heads. In a sense, these wives are tribute (*oa ka loea*), but the queen always gives some *maswalo* She also receives wives from foreign chiefs who supplicate for rain or for peace, and from headmen who settle in her country and send their daughters or sisters; in these cases no *maswalo* is given. Finally, she is sent wives by the nobles, by those to whom she has given wives or cattle with which to secure wives, and by those who promise their little 'mud-stampers' as repayment for the assistance they ask. Sometimes also the queen takes a liking to a girl and asks her in marriage and sometimes commoners send their daughters. It will be impracticable to deal with all these cases; and, from the point of view of the political organization, we are mainly concerned with the wives sent by district heads. They send their daughters for purposes of *ka loea*, a word used in a wide [marriage cattle, See cat. 583 for detail. - Analysis]

643 carriages, abortions, and people dying of any severe coughing illness
 789 prevent rain from falling unless specially buried in wet soil is found
 766 with variations all over the Lowveld, among Sotho and Shangana-Tonga alike.

643 Women rulers have their 'wives' just as though they were men,
 588 and a peculiar feature of Lobedu culture is the large number of wives
 or *bathanoni* of the queen. Every Lobedu induna sends a daughter to

• 644 be a *mothanoni* of the queen; as do also any of the nobility who wish
 [57] to be on a good footing with her; and these, together with
 girls sent by foreign tribes as gifts for rain, form a large harem.

Bathanoni of the chief occupy an honoured position at the Head Kraal,
 have, on the whole, less work than ordinary women and are a source
 of honour to their family who through them become privileged to
 call the queen their *tsetsi*—bridegroom or son-in-law. They may
 be given in marriage to relatives of the queen or to commoners, in
 [557] which case the peculiar situation arises of their children preferring
 to call themselves sons and daughters of the queen, using the surname
 Modjadji, to taking the lineage name of their father. Often, however,
 the *bathanoni* remain with the queen, the ideal being to remain
 virgin for some years, after which they are given their own hut in the

[565] village and permission to have children. A *mothanoni* of noble birth
 ranks higher than a commoner and can even bear the heir to the
 throne when the queen herself is barren. Other Lowveld chiefs do
 [184] not receive daughters from their headmen, though the Khaha and
 Letswalo used to accept girls from foreign chiefs for rain as did the
 Lobedu. These women became a link and source of friendship
 between the two tribes and, especially among Lobedu, played a real
 part in the gradual growth and influence of the tribe. Even the great
 Ngungunyane once sent women to Modjadji for rain, and there are,
 to-day still, at her head kraal sisters and daughters of important chiefs
 in the Northern Transvaal, though money and cattle have now been
 substituted for women in rain transactions.

643 The legal heir to the throne is, in the Lowveld, the eldest son of
 the chief wife, who should always be the daughter of the chief's
 mother's brother. The cattle for this marriage are not, as among the
 [71] Pedi and one or two Highveld tribes, contributed by all the headmen,
 nor are the fires in the country extinguished on the occasion of the
 marriage.

THE NORTH-EASTERN TRANSVAAL SOTHO

273

marriage. Where the chief is a woman, her own son or daughter succeeds. The Lobedu now have a distinct preference for women rulers; the last three chiefs have been women, and the present queen succeeded in preference to her elder uterine brother. It would seem that the fashion was set by the Lobedu, for tribal genealogies show no women chiefs in the Lowveld prior to the accession of Modjadji I. Shortly after that we have the appearance of the first queen in the Khaha and Mamaila tribes, followed later by Letswalo and Mahlo. Lowveld tribes are no exception to the general tendency among Bantu for succession to the throne to be accompanied by trouble and bloodshed. They have, however, an interesting method of submitting the case of various claimants to the decision of the powers that be by the ordeal of trying the door. All claimants to the throne are brought to the closed door of the hut in which the old chief died. One by one, they step forward shouting their own name and ancestry to try the door which, while resisting all efforts of other claimants, flies open at the touch of the rightful heir.¹

The Lowveld chief is assisted and advised in the government of his country by his relatives,² generally known as *bakhomana*. There are no formal councils, as among Tswana, and it is even doubtful whether the *pisjo* or meeting of all adult men in the tribe ever had power to make decisions. Certainly to-day it is called only when orders or notices from European authorities have to be transmitted. No one in the Lobedu tribe ever knows what is happening even in important matters affecting them all, and the tribe accepts with equanimity the most outrageous favouritism of the royal family.

The district, bounded by natural features such as streams or depressions down the hill-sides, is generally quite small, varying in extent from about one square mile to five, so that in a country like Modjadji's with an area of some 140 square miles there are about 100 headmen. Aggregations of districts into larger units under sub-chiefs, such as are found in Zululand, though not unknown, are not

¹ Some one is, of course, inside to hold the door against the wrong claimants and in Modjadji's tribe the chief always has one hut with two doors, said to be for this purpose.

² The *ragwaw* (father's brother) or *rakhali* (father's sister) are often important advisers or, especially where a woman is ruling, the *malaw* (mother's brother).

THE LOVEDU OF THE TRANSVAAL

65

was not announced for a year, while, as the body decomposed, such vital ingredients of the rain-medicine as the skin and body-dirt were carefully collected; after the announcement a period of anarchy often supervened as rival claimants marshalled their armed forces for the struggle for the throne. At the end of this year of mourning all the fires of the country were put out with purificatory rain-medicine (*mufugo*) from the official keeper at the capital.

This fire rite symbolizes purification of the country as well as a transition from one order to another. At any time when the country is not right (*naha a e loge*), as when there is severe drought, the fires are put out 'to usher in a new year' (i.e. a new order or period of operative forces). But the fire rite also symbolizes the means through which the allegiance of subjects and the authority of the queen are asserted. Finally, the beating out of the fires with cooling medicine is part of a complex of practices connected with heat and cold, symbolizing respectively dysphoria and euphoria. The 'earth is hot' (*maru a fesa*) on the death of the queen and a new cosmic order has to be inaugurated by cooling it in preparation for the new rain-maker.

After the fire rite there follows the divine identification of the successor by the rite of opening the door. The rival claimants, one of whom, chosen by the inner royal council and the deceased queen, has been secretly prepared for his office, pass the hut in which the queen has died. They announce their identity to the spirit of the deceased, lightly touching the door of the hut, which yields to the chosen successor.

In and around the inner secret council where the choice is actually made centre serious tensions, not only between the present ruler and the heir-elect for whose sake and succession she must poison herself, apparently not always willingly, but also between those who depend for their position and prestige upon the patronage of one or the other. The 'chosen' heir always goes to live far away, ostensibly to conceal his or her identity but in reality also owing to a serious conflict with the reigning sovereign.¹

For the regulation of cosmic forces the queen relies not only on her divinity but also upon the royal rain-medicines and, in the last resort, on the agreement of the royal ancestor spirits. To prevent the weakening of the rain-medicine it must be revitalized by being given the first termites and first-fruits each year, and occasionally parts of a black sheep or, in the old days, a human being.

Rain-charms are liable to weaken (*fighela*) or become defiled (*khuma*) by certain deviations from the normal course of nature unless special precautions are taken. Twins, babies cutting their upper teeth before their lower, women dying in pregnancy, abortions and miscarriages, men dying from *deri*, a deadly coughing disease believed to be contracted by having intercourse with a woman who has had a miscarriage or abortion or whose child has died before weaning—all these are deviations which contaminate the earth, causing it to be 'hot', and therefore have to be buried in wet soil or

¹ Males are not debarred from succession; indeed the early rulers were all men. But a definite preference for women rulers seems now to be firmly established.

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EILEEN JENSEN KRIGE

- 642 units which, each under a headman, enjoy a considerable
 631 degree of autonomy.¹ A large proportion of these districts into
 634 which the country is divided are ruled by the descendants of
 644 original sections of the nuclear group; a few have been allocated
 562 to alien groups under their own headmen while some are held
 643 by royal women, *batanoni* or 'wives' of the queen. Many
 559 districts now held by commoners originated from *batanoni* but
 588 since women do not succeed one another as heads of districts
 these have been inherited by their sons or husbands given to
 them by the queen. Royal wives (*batanoni*) are of various kinds.
 Some are of royal blood, daughters of close relatives of the
 queen to whom they have been given as a token of homage
 (*ho loba*). Only these are set up by the queen as rulers over
 districts. (Women may also rule areas in their own right where
 there is no male heir, as we shall see). Other royal wives are
 644 the daughters of district heads, while a number are daughters
 643 of foreign chiefs who come, sometimes with cattle, sometimes
 559 with money or a daughter to *loba* the queen for rain. Once a
 538 woman from within the tribe has been accepted by the queen
 582 as a royal wife, the tie is renewed from generation to generation
 634 on the pattern of cross-cousin marriage. Men may offer a
 daughter to the queen also in return for, or in the expectation
 of, economic help or political favour (though these are not
 always accepted) and there is a tendency today for districts to
 be subdivided into smaller and smaller units to satisfy the
 political aspirations of ambitious subjects. Royal wives bind
 to the queen not only her closest relatives but most of the
 important people in the tribe. Some wives are given away in
 marriage to her councillors, relatives and district headmen.
 836 Some remain with her and have allocated lovers. Children of
 602 these latter call the queen 'father' and she is responsible for
 helping them to marry.
 563 The Lobedu proper appear originally to have regarded
 613 themselves as an aristocracy but today it is only the royal
 lineage (*ba Mohale*) and a number of important Lobedu district
 heads that are looked up to. Many non-Lobedu lineages have,
 by virtue of marriage links through royal wives, a higher status
 and are more closely related to the queen than sections of
 Lobedu themselves.

¹ For a general account of the Lobedu, see Krige, E. J. 1941, Krige, E. J. and J. D., 1945 and 1950, and Krige, J. D., 1939.